

# The Honor of The Big Snows

By JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD, Author of "The Danger Trail"

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## CHAPTER VII. Almost a Woman.

THE next morning Jan struck out over his old trail to the Hasabala. The Crees were gone. He spent a day swinging east and west and found old trails leading into the north.

"They have gone up among the Eskimos," he said to himself. "Ah, Kazan, what in the name of the saints is that?"

The leading dog dropped upon his haunches with a menacing growl as a lone figure staggered across the snow toward them. It was Croisset. With a groan, he dropped upon the sled.

"I am sick and starving," he wailed. "The fiend himself has got into my cabin, and for three days I've had nothing but snow and a raw whisky jack."

"Sick!" cried Jan, drawing a step away from him.

"Yes, sick from an empty belly, and this, and this!" He showed a forearm done up in a bloody rag and pointed to his neck, from which the skin was peeling. "I was gone ten days with that red cloth you gave me, and when I came back, if there wasn't the horror itself grinning at me from the top of my own shanty! I tried to get in, but my wife barred the door and said that she would shoot me if I didn't get back into the woods. I tried to steal in at night through a window, and she drenched me in hot water. I built a wigwam at the edge of the forest, and stayed there for five days. Hooray! Blessed saints, I had no matches, no grub, and when I got close enough to yell these things to her she kept her word and plunked me through a crack in the door, so that I lost a pint of blood from this arm."

"I'll give you something to eat," laughed Jan, undoing his pack. "How long has the red flag been up?"

"I've lost all count of time, but it's twelve days, if an hour, and I swear it's going to take all winter to get it down."

"It's not the plague. Go back and tell your wife so." But Croisset said he would go to Lac Bain.

Jan left him beside a good fire and turned into the southwest to burn Langlois and his cabin. Then he continued westward. At the head of the Porcupine he found the remains of three burned wigwams, and from one of them he dug out charred bones.

Croisset reached the post forty-eight hours after he had encountered Jan.

"The red flag is everywhere!" he cried, catching sight of the signal over

his rough cheeks.

The next morning when Cummins went to awaken her his face went as white as death. Melisse was not asleep. Her eyes were wide open and staring at him, and her soft cheeks burned with the hot glow of fire.

"You are sick, Melisse," he whispered hoarsely. "You are sick!"

He fell upon his knees beside her and lifted her face in his hands. The touch of it sent a chill to his heart, such as he had not felt since years ago, in that other room a few steps away.

"I want Jan," she pleaded. "I want Jan to come back to me!"

"I will send for him, dear. He will come back soon. I will go out and send Croisset."

He hid his face from her as he dragged himself away. Croisset saw him coming and came out of the store to meet him. A hundred yards away Cummins stopped.

"Croisset, for the love of God, take a team and go after Jan Thoreau," he called. "Tell him that Melisse is dying of the plague. Hurry, hurry!"

"Night and day!" shouted Croisset. Twenty minutes later from the cabin window Cummins saw him start.

"Jan will be here very soon, Melisse," he said, running his fingers gently through her hair. Toward evening there came a change. The fever left the child's cheeks. Her eyes closed and she fell asleep. Through the night Cummins sat near the door, but in the gray dawn, overcome by his long vigil, his head dropped upon his breast and he slumbered.

When he awoke the cabin was filled with light. He heard a sound and, startled, sprang to his feet. Melisse was at the stove building a fire.

"I'm better this morning, father. Why didn't you sleep until breakfast was ready?"

Cummins stared. Then he gave a shout, made a rush for her and, catching her up in his arms, danced about the cabin like a great bear, overturning the chairs and allowing the room to fill with smoke in his wild joy.

"It's what you saw through the window that made you sick, Melisse," he cried, putting her down at last. "I thought"—He paused and added, his voice trembling, "I thought you were going to be sick for more than one day, my sweet little woman!"

He opened one of the windows to let in the fresh air of the morning.

When Croisset returned he did not find a red flag over Cummins' cabin, nor did he bring word of Jan. For three days he had followed the trails to the south without finding the boy. But he brought back other news. Williams was sick with the plague in a Cree wigwam on the lower Porcupine. It was the last they ever heard of the factor, except that he died some time in March and was buried by the Crees.

Croisset went back over the Churchill trail and found his wife ready to greet him with open arms. After that he joined Per-ee, who came in from the north, in another search for Jan. They found neither trace nor word of him after passing the Gray Otter, and Cummins gave up hope.

It was not for long that their fears could be kept from Melisse. This first bitter grief that had come into her life fell upon her with a force which alarmed Cummins and cast him into deep gloom. With growing despair Cummins saw his own efforts fail.

As the days passed Melisse mingled more and more with the Indian and half breed children and spent much of her time at the company's store, listening to the talk of the men, silent, attentive, unresponsive to any efforts they might make to engage her smiles. From her own heart she looked out upon a world that had become a void for her. Jan had been mother, brother and everything that was tender and sweet to her, and he was gone. Mukke, whom she had loved, was gone. Williams was gone. The world was changed, terribly and suddenly, and it added years to her perspective of things.

Each day, as the weeks went on and the spring sun began to soften the snow, she became a little more like the wild children at Lac Bain and in the forest. They were eating dinner one day in the early spring, with the sunshine flooding in upon them, when a quick, low footfall caused Melisse to lift her eyes in the direction of the open door. A strange figure stood there, with bloodless face, staring eyes and garments hanging in tatters, but its arms were stretched out, as those same arms had been held out to her a thousand times before, and, with the old glad cry, Melisse darted with the swiftness of a sun shadow beyond Cummins, crying:

"Jan, Jan, my Jan!"

Words choked in Cummins' throat when he saw the white faced figure clutching Melisse to its breast.

At last he gasped "Jan!" and threw out his arms, so that both were caught in their embrace.

For an instant Jan turned his face up to the light. The other stared and understood.

"You have been sick," he said, "but it has left no marks."

"Thank God!" breathed Jan.

Peace followed in the blighted trails of the Red Terror. Again the forest world breathed without fear, but from

Hudson's bay to Athabasca and as far south as the thousand waters of the Reindeer country the winds whispered of a terrible grief that would remain until babes were men and men were to their graves.

The plague had taken a thousand souls, and yet the laughing, dancing



"Jan, Jan, my Jan!"

millions in that other big world beyond the edge of the wilderness caught only a passing rumor of what had happened.

Lac Bain suffered least of the far northern posts, with the exception of Churchill, where the icy winds, downpouring from the arctic, had sent the Red Terror shivering to the westward. In the late snows word came that Cummins was to take Williams' place as factor, and Per-ee at once set off for the Fond du Lac to bring back Jean de Grey's "chief man." Croisset gave up his fox hunting to fill Mukke's place.

The changes brought new happiness to Melisse. Croisset's wife was a good woman who had spent her girlhood in Montreal, and now, now the mother of a fine, enterprising little Jean and a handsome daughter, was a soft, sweet young woman, who had grown sweeter and prettier with her years, which is not usually the case with half breed women.

"But it's good blood in her, beautiful blood," vaunted Jean proudly whenever the opportunity came. "Her mother was a princess and her father a pure Frenchman whose father's father was a chief de battalion. What better than that, eh? I say, what better could there be than that?"

So, for the first time in her life, Melisse discovered the joys of companionship with those of her own kind.

This new companionship, pleasant as it was, did not come between her and Jan. If anything they were more to each other than ever.

She no longer looked upon Jan as a mere playmate, a being whose diversion was to amuse and to love her. He had become a man. In her eyes he was a hero who had gone forth to fight the death of which she still heard word and whisper all about her. Croisset's wife and her daughter told her that he had done the bravest thing that a man might do on earth.

Together they resumed their studies, devoting hours to them each day, and through all that summer he taught her to play upon his violin. The warm months were a time of idleness at Lac Bain, and Jan made the most of them in his teaching of Melisse. She learned to read the books which he had used at Fort Churchill, and by midsummer she could read those which he had used at York factory. At night they wrote letters to each other and delivered them across the table in the cabin, while Cummins looked on and smoked, laughing happily at what they read aloud to him.

One night, late enough in the season for a fire to be crackling merrily in the stove, Jan was reading one of these letters when Melisse cried:

"Stop, Jan—stop there!"

Jan caught himself, and he blushed mightily when he read the next lines:

"I think you have beautiful eyes. I love them."

"What is it?" cried Cummins interestedly. "Read on, Jan."

"Don't!" commanded Melisse, springing to her feet and running around the table. "I didn't mean you to read that!"

She snatched the paper from Jan's hand and threw it into the fire.

Jan's blood filled with pleasure, and at the bottom of his next letter he wrote back:

"I think you have beautiful hair. I love it."

That winter Jan was appointed post hunter, and this gave him much time at home, for meat was plentiful along the edge of the Barrens. The two continued at their books until they came to the end of what Jan knew in them.

After that, like searchers in strange places, they felt their way onward, slowly and with caution. During the next summer they labored through all the books which were in the little box in the corner of the cabin.

It was Melisse who now played most on the violin. One day she looked curiously into the F-hole of the instrument, and her pretty mouth puckered itself into a round, red "O" of astonishment when Jan quickly snatched the violin from her hands.

"Excuse me, my pretty Melisse," he laughed at her in French. "I am going to play you something new."

That same day he took the little cloth covered roll from the violin and gave it another hiding place.

Every fiber of his being sang in joyful response as he watched Melisse pass from childhood into young girlhood. To him Melisse was growing into everything that was beautiful. She was his world, his life, and at Post Lac Bain there was nothing to come between the two. Jan noticed that in her thirteenth year she could barely stand under his outstretched arm. The next year she had grown so tall that she could not stand there at all. Very soon she would be a woman.

(To Be Continued.)

## HARD-WORKING SWISS DOGS

They Are Used as Draft Animals and Are Not Always Well Treated.

An amended law for the prevention of cruelty to animals, such as that which came into force in England on New Year's day, is much needed in Switzerland. Not that the Swiss as a nation are cruel to animals, one of the best proofs of which is the number of sleek cats about. For when people have learned to be kind to cats they have generally learned to be fairly kind to animals in general. But, whether from thoughtlessness or some other cause, there is a good deal to be desired in the way draft dogs are treated in Switzerland. Dogs, as every visitor to the country must have observed, are still employed there for drawing or helping to draw all kinds of light carts. Most milkmen and bakers employ dogs when taking around milk or bread. Butchers and vegetable fruit sellers also use them. These dogs are, of course, all of strong build, but of very different breeds, those most commonly employed being of the St. Bernard or mastiff race. On a market day the streets of Berne are full of them. As a rule they do not look ill fed and their harness fits them well. Nevertheless, it is evident that they are often hard worked, for they may be seen lying stretched full length asleep on the cold, wet ground, or even on the snow, and this, after they have been heated by the exertion of pulling, frequently causes pneumonia or rheumatism.—Pall Mall Gazette.

## FREE PLEASURES IN LONDON

Finest Music in Churches and Sights That Will Interest The Relic Hunter.

In London there are pleasures to be had for nothing, as was explained to me by a hard-working woman with no money margin for enjoyments. With two feet and a pair of boots she could hear music every evening during Lent from Westminster Abbey to St. Alban's, Holborn, and the church in Soho which rivals the restaurant in attraction. And all for nothing—only she confessed to putting a half-penny into the bag from her own depleted purse. The scientific economist could probably spend a pleasant day in London without spending anything else.

Some London relics have wandered farther afield than the Black Boy of Clement's Inn. Swanage possesses quite an assortment. The entire stone facade of the Mercers' Hall, Cheapside, is to be found in the High street, whither it was moved from London in 1882. Facing the sea is a Gothic clock tower taken bodily from London bridge, where it had been erected as a memorial to the Duke of Wellington. And in several roads about the town may be seen iron street posts, inscribed "St. Ann's Soho" and "St. Martin's-in-the-Field." The explanation is that two quarries of Swanage became paying contractors in London and patriotically transported to their native town the more picturesque oddments which found their way into their yard.—London Chronicle.

## Proof of Riches.

Patience—They say he was taken sick on the train.

Patrice—Indeed? What was the matter?

"Oh, he ate too much in a dining car."

"Oh! Is he as rich as that?"

## Novel Use for Aviation.

Probably Darius Green never had a dream that his flying machine would be used in a scheme to prove to wild hunters in the Philippine Islands that they were inferior to white men. This political project, however, was tried by Aviator L. Hammond, who at the request of the governor of the islands, gave to the chief of a tribe of Igorotte hunters his first aerial ascension. The tribesmen were very apprehensive regarding the result, and even the chief himself took his seat in the car with ill-concealed trepidation, but after making a lofty flight over the leper colony and the surrounding country, he was brought back safely to the starting point fully convinced of the absolute supremacy of the paleface.

## Woman as Jail Governor.

Mme. Jenny Porchet, who has charge of the prison at Aigle, in the Canton of Vaud, France, is now 52 years of age, and 31 years ago she married the then prison governor.

At his death the authorities advertised for a successor, and among the applicants was his widow, who had managed the prison during her husband's long illness. Another point in her favor was her physique. In height she wants only an inch of six feet, and possesses the muscles of a wrestler. The prison commission doubted her fitness, but when she offered to try her strength against the most powerful gendarme, all doubts subsided. The prison is said to be the best managed in Switzerland.

## Die! Cheering the Kaiser.

The bravery displayed by the musicians on the Titanic and the similar exhibition on the English ship Birkenhead recalls also the patriotic conduct of the band on board the German gunboat Itla, which went to the bottom of the Chinese sea on August 25, 1896. The scene was at that time described by one of the few survivors of the disaster, which claimed 118 of the little crew. He said that the men stood at parade, the band played "Hell Dir im Siegerkranz" with all the precision and force of which they were capable and swinging their caps, the officers and men went down cheering the Kaiser.

## Giving to Their Superstition.

The Chinese, like the Indians, have their medicine men. The medical missionaries have done an admirable work in China, and now, albeit as a last resort, a portion of the 430,000,000 of population will appeal to them in preference to the native doctors. The London Lancet says: "In some localities the natives may still be found burning large quantities of gold and silver paper along with incense in the hope of averting, for example, a threatened invasion of their homes by cholera, plague, or smallpox, or firing guns and beating cymbals in order to frighten away the malignant spirits likely to give rise to mischief."

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Jan Burnett Langlois and His Cabin.

Mukke's cabin. "It is to the east and west of the Hasabala as thick as jays in springtime!"

A Cree from the Gray Otter drove in on his way north. "Six wigwams with dead in them," he reported in his own language to Williams. "A company man, with a one eyed leader and four trappers, left the Gray Otter to burn them." Williams took down his birch bark canoe and bellowed a weird signal to Cummins, who opened a crack of his door to listen, with Melisse close beside him.

"Thoreau is in the thick of it to the south," he called. "There's too much of it for him, and I'm going down with the dogs. Croisset will stay in the store for a few days."

The days brought quick changes now. One morning the moose horn called Cummins to the door. It was the fifth day after Williams had gone south.

"There was no smoke this morning, and I looked through the window," shouted Croisset. "Mukke and the old man are both dead. I'm going to burn the cabin."

A stifled groan of anguish fell from Cummins' lips as he went like a dazed man to his cot and flung himself face downward upon it. Melisse could see his strong frame shaking as if he were crying like a child, and, twining her arms tightly about his neck, she sobbed out her passionate grief against